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AREA EXTENSION WORK--A PILOT STUDY OF THE PROFESSIONAL STATUS OF AREA EXTENSION PERSONNEL IN CALIFORNIA, 1961.

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THE INCREASED PRESSURE FOR GREATER EXPERTISE OF EXTENSION AGENTS, COMBINED WITH LIMITATIONS FOR SPECIALIZATION IMPOSED BY COUNTY LINES, HAS RESULTED IN VARIOUS APPROACHES TO AREA WORK. THE PURPOSE OF THIS STUDY WAS TO TEST THE POSSIBILITY OF INCREASING EFFICIENCY, PROVIDING BETTER SERVICE, DEVELOPING A HIGHER DEGREE OF COMPETENCY AMONG STAFF MEMBERS, AND INCREASING THE PERSONAL SATISFACTION OF FARM ADVISERS BY PERMITTING CROSS-COUNTY WORK. THE STUDY FOCUSED ON EXTENSION PERSONNEL IN AREA WORK UNDER THE BARTER AND CASH REIMBURSEMENT METHODS. DATA WERE OBTAINED FROM PERSONNEL IN AREA EXTENSION WORK IN GLENN AND BUTTE COUNTIES (BARTER) AND SUTTER AND COLUSA COUNTIES (CASH REIMBURSEMENT), BOTH PAIRS OF COUNTIES HAVING STARTED CROSS-COUNTY WORK IN DAIRY AND CERTIFIED SEED PRODUCTION DURING 1960. COUNTY EXTENSION DIRECTORS WERE UNANIMOUS IN APPROVING AREA EXTENSION WORK AND ITS POTENTIAL FOR IMPROVING THE EFFICIENCY OF THE SERVICE. THEY PREFERRED THE BARTER OVER CASH REIMBURSEMENT. FARM ADVISERS, IN MANY CASES, FELT AREA WORK MADE MORE WORKLOAD FOR THEM. THE STATE SPECIALIST FELT AREA WORK WAS LOGICAL, EFFECTIVE, AND EFFICIENT. ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS MUST BE SOLVED TO EFFECT A SMOOTH TRANSITION. (EB)

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AREA EXTENSION WORK:

A Pilot Study of the Professional Status of Area Extension Personnel in California, 1961

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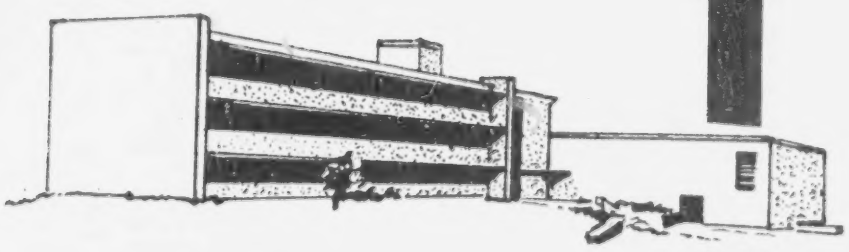

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AREA EXTENSION WORK: A PILOT STUDY

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The Cooperative Extension Service was originally organized to facilitate close, person-to-person relationships with clientele. In the early part of the twentieth century this resulted in placing extension offices in counties, with county lines being the logical boundaries for areas of responsibility. Many developments including those in transportation, communications and education, suggest the need for modifications of the local extension organization to obtain greater efficiency.

People desiring information are often well informed specialists in their field, and consequently there is a demand for extension personnel with greater expertise. At the same time, work is expanding among the so-called "hard-to-reach" segments of our society: i.e., those in lower socio-economic groups, young high school dropouts, teenage parents, retirees, and others in need of educational programs. Other areas of program emphasis that require specialized talents include public affairs and resource development. Clients in these latter groups also require extension personnel with a high degree of competency quite different from that required of staff working with a more traditional type of clientele.

Regardless of the audience or the type of educational program in question, extension personnel at the local level must attain a higher degree of competency than in the past. However, it is seldom possible for an extension worker to be an expert in many fields, and in most cases, the historic limitations of county lines do not justify the full-time employment of staff members with a subject matter specialty.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT: This pilot study was made possible by the state administrative staff in the California Agricultural Extension Service. Particular thanks goes to John Spurlock, Assistant State Director, who suggested the need for a study and to Barry Leeson, County Director in Eldorado County, who assisted in developing and carrying it out.

This increased pressure for greater expertise of extension agents, combined with the limitations for specialization imposed by county lines, has resulted in various approaches to area work, sometimes called cross-county or multi-county work.[1] Several approaches have been taken and were recently summarized in a study made by the Federal Extension Service.[2]

Purpose of Study

The primary purpose of this pilot study was to develop a body of information and possible guide lines for use by extension administrators and staff concerned with area extension work. The study was designed to obtain information from extension personnel concerning their reactions, experiences, and feelings about area work, and to obtain suggestions which might be helpful in the establishment of area extension work elsewhere. Specifically, an attempt was made:

1. To obtain information about arrangements made prior to adoption of area extension work in two sets of counties--one set involved in a barter and the other in a cash reimbursement arrangement.
2. To obtain recommendations for extension personnel beginning area extension work of a cross-county or multi-county nature.
3. To determine the primary problems and concerns of farm advisors, county directors, and specialists involved in area work in the selected counties.
4. To determine if area extension work in the counties in question actually permitted extension personnel to become more proficient in an area of specialization.
5. To determine the effect of area extension work on job satisfaction of the extension personnel involved.

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[1]The term area work is preferable to the terms cross-county, multi-county, or inter-county work, since a feasible assignment in a specific subject matter area need not cross county lines.

[2]Federal Extension Service, Area Agent Study. A report on the review of Multi-County Area Agents Operations in Thirteen States. United States Department of Agriculture, 1965.

Situation

Many states have only one or two extension staff members per county, and technical subject matter is taught primarily by the state specialists at meetings arranged by county extension personnel. In contrast, most California county farm and home advisors are subject matter experts and are housed in offices with a number of extension personnel. They maintain their competency through in-service training taught by state extension specialists who are in constant contact with the research staff of the university.

In some counties in California, however, geographic agricultural production areas do not coincide with county lines, and potential clientele are not in sufficient numbers to justify a county extension staff member in each major specialty area. Consequently, farm advisors in these counties must be responsible for several commodities, which in some cases are not closely allied. However, agricultural commodities are often produced in sufficient quantity in two or more counties to justify a full-time extension appointment.

At the time of this study, several pilot projects had been developed to test the possibility of increasing efficiency, providing better service, developing a higher degree of competency among staff members, and increasing the personal satisfaction of farm advisors by permitting cross-county work.

The problem had been approached in five ways: (1) a barter arrangement between counties, (2) cross-county work on a reimbursement basis, (3) administrative units, (4) branch offices, and (5) informal and special cooperative arrangements.

This study focused on extension personnel in area work under the barter and reimbursement methods. The California extension administrative staff had assisted in these two approaches to area work by:

1. Encouraging arrangements between counties under a barter arrangement, whereby one county provided an area agent in two or more counties in return for the

services of an area agent from another county, in another subject matter field, or,

2. Helping establish a financial reimbursement arrangement between two or more counties whereby services of a highly specialized farm advisor or advisors were contracted.

In each case a mutually satisfactory arrangement was developed by appropriate elected county officials, county extension staff, and local commercial farmers.

Scope and Methods of Study

Data were obtained from extension personnel who had been in area extension work for approximately one year, primarily in two sets of counties, Glenn and Butte, and Sutter and Colusa Counties. However, one of the agents involved worked in six counties.

Interviews were conducted with seven county extension staff members and one specialist actively involved in area extension work. Three of the seven were county directors and the remainder were farm advisors. Six of the seven were actively doing area extension work. Though not an area agent himself, the seventh was a county director in a county serving as headquarters for an agent who was doing 4-H Club work in two counties.

Glenn and Butte Counties were selected for the study because they represented an informal barter arrangement between two counties. Sutter and Colusa Counties served as an example of a monetary arrangement between two counties, in this case involving 4-H Club work.

Both pairs of counties had started cross-county work in dairy and certified seed production during 1960, after an informal agreement was reached by the respective boards of supervisors, county extension directors, and the state extension administrative staff. Shortly after that agreement, Glenn and Butte Counties made additional arrangements to permit specialization in the crops reported in the following table.

Agricultural Production of Livestock and Crops Involved in Cross-county Extension Work in Glenn and Butte Counties, California, 1960*

Product	Number of Units	Value of Crop	Number of Farms
Glenn County			
Livestock			
Sheep and Lambs	202,000 head	$ 3,489,000	312
Dairy Cows (2 yrs. or older)	26,500 head	4,930,000	454
Crops			
Rice	36,152 acres	7,989,600	181
Certified Seed	13,373 acres	2,230,000	-
Citrus	605 acres	146,300	422
Almonds and Hulls	3,303 acres	957,000	322
Butte County			
Livestock			
Sheep and Lambs	36,000 head	594,000	202
Dairy Cows (2 yrs. or older)	6,100 head	1,682,000	179
Crops			
Rice	48,169 acres	10,019,100	210
Certified Seed	20,237 acres	964,330	-
Citrus	488 acres	171,800	426
Almonds and Hulls	14,041 acres	3,137,100	881

*The commodities listed represent the fields of work involved in cross-county arrangements. Data is based on the 1960 Agricultural Commissioners Reports and the 1959 U. S. Census of Agriculture.

Two men conducted each interview in the study. Both interviewers took notes with no particular order required in answering the questions. As the interview progressed, a check was made to see that all questions had been answered, but care was taken not to rigidly structure the interviews. This approach permitted a freer type of discussion and tended to minimize interference with the trend of thought of the person being interviewed. Additional points made by the interviewees but not specifically asked for in the questionnaire were recorded. Following each interview, the notes of the interviewers were combined and checked for accuracy. Questions included in the interviews are presented in Appendix A.

Interviews with County Directors

County extension directors were unanimous in their enthusiasm for area extension work and its potentiality for improving the efficiency of the Extension Service. They preferred the barter over the cash remuneration arrangement where practicable, since it eliminated the complication of having to prepare a separate budget for each county in which an area agent worked. They felt that it provided the same benefits as those provided by a financial remuneration arrangement.

The following generalizations are based on interviews with county directors.

1. Initiation of area work had been done slowly and carefully in consultation with local clientele and county commissioners. County extension directors had first discussed the situations in their respective counties, then had visited with individual farm cooperators and finally called a meeting of farm cooperators to discuss the advantages and disadvantages of area work. The subject was then discussed with county commissioners individually. In one county the commissioners placed the subject of area extension work on the agenda at one of their meetings. A large contingency of farmers was present to support the idea of area work, which the commissioners also favored, provided the approach was also acceptable to the local people. County com-

missioners and extension cooperators in that county viewed area work as a means of providing a higher degree of specialization at the county level with available human resources, without substantially increasing the cost.

2. All county directors felt that the county staff had been upgraded through improved competencies made possible by area extension work. They believed that the new arrangement increased overall efficiency of performance and the value of service per tax dollar.

3. The county directors emphasized the importance of developing an attitude of cooperation and support from extension personnel involved where area extension work is to be established.

4. Where multi-county work was to be instituted they felt the area should not be separated by physical barriers which might impair travel or communication.

5. County directors had received no serious complaints from extension clientele about area work.

6. County directors felt that the farm advisor with an area assignment should be administratively responsible to the county director in the county where he is housed.

7. An understanding concerning utilization of secretarial help in the extension offices in the area should be reached by all staffs concerned. An area agent can easily impose upon the secretaries in the extension offices in his area without realizing it, and consequently interfere with the efficient operation of the respective offices.

Interviews with Farm Advisors

The responses of farm advisors to questions about their experiences in area extension work were not as uniform as those of county extension directors. Some of the findings from the interviews with farm advisors were:

1. Farm advisors were pleased with their new assignment in area extension work, and felt it afforded them a welcome opportunity to specialize when: (1) they had one extension program in the counties in which they worked, rather than a separate program in each county, and (2) they had fewer responsibilities as a result of the larger geographical area of responsibility. One farm advisor who had gone from a general assignment to an area assignment commented that he was pleased that extension cooperators now regarded and introduced him as an expert in his respective field.

2. Farm advisors who met the criteria described above felt that area extension work had not increased their work load, even though their travel had increased.

3. A farm advisor who already had a relatively limited assignment in terms of subject matter, but who had clientele in an additional county added to his responsibilities, was concerned with the increase in his work load. Cooperators in his field required considerable individual help, in his opinion, and it was not possible to do more of the educational work with mass media.

4. The farm advisor in 4-H work found it necessary to have two separate programs, one in each county for which he was responsible. In some instances he was able to combine leader training activities, but the feeling of loyalty toward county activities that had developed over the years made it impossible to combine as many county-wide activities as he had hoped. He felt this problem would likely not exist in counties which had a more similar history of experiences in 4-H work. Since each county had previously developed its own philosophy, these two counties were quite different in details of operation. Much work was needed to overcome restrictions to program coordination caused by program practices of the past.

5. The farm advisors interviewed identified themselves first with the University of California, and then with the counties for which they were responsible. Their

business cards gave their name, the University of California, and the respective counties in which they worked, in that order.

6. Working in more than one county had not materially affected the number of office calls and telephone calls per county.

7. Serious questions were raised about the most efficient manner of expediting office and telephone calls. Clientele sometimes showed signs of impatience when an extension agent was in another county, even though word was left for him, particularly when the agent was officed in the other county. Various approaches had been taken to facilitate communication, including the placing of self-addressed post cards in extension offices and in other accessible locations in the counties for which the agent was responsible. One farm advisor maintained regular office days in each county, which was satisfactory for appointments, but not for emergency requests.

8. Farm advisors who transferred to area extension work generally stayed in the same subject field or in one closely allied.

9. The practice of attending weekly office conferences in counties for which farm advisors were responsible was not consistent. Some attended all conferences, others attended only office conferences in the county in which they were housed.

10. People in counties for which the extension agents were not responsible had requested that they be placed on the farm advisors commodity letter mailing list, and sometimes had asked for the farm advisors' publications. These requests increased in number as agents' reputations as experts increased. This raised the question of financing the letters and of policy concerning the providing of services out of the area.

11. The policy for distributing monthly statistical and narrative reports had not been finalized at the time of the study. Some advisors mailed reports to all county directors involved, others did not.

12. All advisors mentioned some concerns and disadvantages resulting from their multi-county assignment. Included among their concerns was an efficient means of answering office and telephone calls in the absence of the farm advisor, arrangements for buying demonstration and other supplies to be used in the assignment area, expenses incurred when it was necessary or desirable to stay overnight in the neighboring county as when working on test plots in an outer perimeter section of the area, and arrangements in case of an accident in a neighboring county with a county car.

Interview with Specialists

The state specialist interviewed felt that area extension work was logical, effective, and efficient, and that more of it should be done to keep pace with the demands of clientele.

Concerns suggested for consideration were:

1. State production specialists having several crop responsibilities might find it difficult to keep pace with farm advisors handling a subject matter area, and in some cases handling only one crop. The relationship between state and county staff should be studied in this new situation. State specialists in the horizontal subject matter areas would not have this problem.[3]

2. As farm advisors gain competency in their subject matter field they will likely become recognized as authorities in their field, and may be invited for speaking engagements outside their counties. Requests for literature and commodity letters may be made from other counties and even other states. This aspect of the problem needs consideration to prevent friction and professional jealousies where possible.

3. Farm advisors should always be relieved of some of their previous responsibilities before being assigned to area extension work.

[3]Horizontal subject matter areas are those that are important to several traditional fields of study. Examples are work in weeds, irrigation and soils.

Conclusions and Recommendations

1. Assignments in area extension work are likely to be more effective if there is one educational program in the assigned area rather than a program in each county involved.

2. Communication problems are greatly aggravated by area extension work and must receive special attention. Communication with other professional staff members and with clientele should be studied. These problems may be offset by application of modern technology such as some form of private line service between the assignment areas and the extension offices and automobile telephones for agents. Training of staff in inter-office communication procedures, such as those practiced in larger and more complex organizational structures, seems justified.

3. Careful study should be made of the customs and traditions of the counties involved in proposed area extension work to determine what transitional stages may be needed in the initiation of area work.

4. Legitimization of area work by both clientele in the subject matter area concerned and by local governmental officials is extremely important. While area extension work promises increased efficiencies, it must have the approval of the people involved if it is to be successful.

5. Extension personnel may play the role of either innovator or blocker of area work, depending upon their understanding of the work and their impression of the effect it promises to have on their professional stature.

6. Assignment of extension agents to area responsibilities should be accompanied by a corresponding reduction in number of subject matter areas and duties.

7. Increased travel and other operating expenses should be anticipated and planned for. Where possible, financial details should be worked out in advance. Potential financial problem areas include costs of mailing materials from one county to another, responses to out-of-area

requests, costs of paper and other office supplies, automobile costs--including towing charges and auto insurance--and overnight expenses, in certain circumstances.

8. Because of the loyalty counties have developed for their own 4-H customs and activities, area work may find more obstacles in youth work than in other subjects. The transitional-educational stage consequently may be much longer where youth area work is to be initiated.

9. The role of the state subject matter specialist will likely be substantially altered by area work. More specific assignments may be required to enable state specialists to continue effective service as resource consultants and in-service trainers to area extension staff. Constant attention to the role of the state specialist, as area work develops, is needed. Changing roles will require increasingly specialized academic work for specialists, with a need for corresponding opportunities for professional improvement.

10. Determination of logical areas for extension assignments is one of the major administrative problems. In agriculture the development of state agricultural commodity production maps on transparent overlays may be useful. These maps should include both number of producing units and size of units by commodity. Such maps may help compare possible areas of extension work with available resources.

11. Further research is needed to determine the key, or critical, steps in the educational-transitional stage of initiating area extension work, the concerns and satisfactions to professional staff accruing from area work, and the relative effectiveness of area work versus county work per unit of investment.

Interview Schedule for County Director

Staff Member _____ Date _____

County _____

Questions for County Director.

1. What is the history of the development of inter-county extension work in Glenn and Butte counties? (include dates)

2. What are your feelings about the efficiency of inter-county extension work now that you have had some experience with it? (illustrate)

   Advantages and disadvantages.

3. What role was played by the board of supervisors? (What was and is their attitude?)

4. Would you make any changes in organization or arrangements if you had it to do again?

5. What suggestions would you make to counties preparing to go into inter-county work?

6. What do you expect from inter-county farm advisors' monthly and annual reports?

7. What effect has working across county lines had on farm advisors in your county?

8. What has been cooperator reaction to inter-county work?

9. How does the work load before cross-county arrangements compare with the work load since the arrangement?

   For County Director.

   For Farm Advisors.

10. Is a man doing one extension program in an area or two extension programs in two counties?

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Interview Schedule for Farm Advisors

Staff Member _____ Date _____

County _____

Questions for Farm Advisors (Extension Agents)

1. What is your field of specialization?
2. What was your field prior to multi-county extension work?
3. How do you feel about inter-county extension work now that you have had some experience with it?
4. What do you feel are the main advantages of inter-county extension work? (illustrate)
5. What are the primary disadvantages of doing extension work across county lines? (illustrate)
6. How do you feel the inter-county appointment has affected you professionally? Why?
7. What has been the reaction of cooperators to a person working in a county in addition to their own?
8. How many cooperators are you now serving? How does this compare with your prior appointments? What effect has inter-county work had on your total work load? (travel, meetings, farm calls, in-service training). Work load before you started. Now.
9. What travel arrangements do you have?
10. Are they satisfactory? Who provides your car and by whom is it serviced?
11. How far can a farm advisor successfully travel to adequately serve extension cooperators?
12. What effect, if any, has inter-county work had upon communication, i.e., grapevine, relationship to county directors, contacts with fellow extension workers, office meetings, etc.?
13. With whom do you identify yourself? How do you describe your position to cooperators?

14. How do you handle monthly and annual reports?

15. Where do farmers from the other counties go for information? (Do they call, leave messages in their extension office, or go to your county?).

16. What effect has inter-county work had upon your feelings of satisfaction with extension?

17. Are you doing one extension program in one area or an extension program in each county? Why?

Interview Schedule for Specialists

Staff Member_____ Date _____

County _____

Questions for Specialists.

1. How do you feel about inter-county extension work now that you have had some experience with it?

2. What do you feel are the main advantages of inter-county extension work? (illustrate)

3. What are the primary disadvantages of doing extension work across county lines? (illustrate)

4. What effect, if any, has inter-county work had upon communications, i.e., grapevine, relationship to county directors, contacts with fellow extension workers, office meetings, etc.?

5. Is a man doing one extension program in an area or an extension program in each county?

6. What suggestions would you make to counties preparing to go into area extension work?

Other comments:

Extension Service - Kansas State University - Manhattan

Extension Study 1 April 1966

Cooperative Extension Work in Agriculture and Home Economics, Kansas State University of Agriculture and Applied Science, and the United States Department of Agriculture. Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914. Harold E. Jones, Director.

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